

Committee on Public Health Consequences of Changes in the Cannabis Policy Landscape: Committee Meeting 3

Speaker Biographies



Celestina Barbosa-Leiker

Dr. Celestina Barbosa-Leiker is a Professor in the College of Nursing and Executive Vice Chancellor at Washington State University Health Sciences Spokane. Dr. Barbosa-Leiker's research focuses on substance use in underserved populations. Her research has demonstrated gender differences in the measurement of opioid withdrawal, relapse while in treatment, and predictors of relapse. Her additional line of research focuses on the transition from pregnancy to parenthood in women with substance use disorders. She is currently leading an interdisciplinary research team to assess mothers, infants, and healthcare providers in order to better care for women with opioid use disorders, as well as for women using cannabis during pregnancy. Her NIH funding largely focuses on the link between psychological risk factors (stress, depression, and substance use), quality of life, community, and brain aging in American Indians. The results of these studies will help better educate healthcare providers, inform policy, and improve standards of care.



Alex Brill

Alex Brill is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he studies the impact of tax policy on the US economy as well as the fiscal, economic, and political consequences of tax, budget, health care, retirement security, and trade policies. He is also the founder and CEO of Matrix Global Advisors (MGA), an economic policy consulting firm. Previously, Alex served as the policy director and chief economist of the House Ways and Means Committee and served on the staff of the White House Council of Economic Advisers.



Imani Brown

Dr. Imani Brown is an urban policy, planning and economic development professional with more than 25 years' experience in the areas of public policy, sustainable urban land use, government relations, and small business development. She currently serves as the Social Equity Program Director for the City of Los Angeles' Department of Cannabis Regulation. Her Social Equity Program focuses on Business, Licensing,

Compliance and Technical Assistance, Financial Grants, Pro Bono & Low Bono Legal Services and equity-centered policy reform that assists Social Equity Individual Applicants, Licensees, and Operators in Los Angeles.



Garland Doyle

Garland Doyle, M.P.A., CNP serves as the City Clerk for Pontiac, Michigan and the Board President of the National Council on Municipal Cannabis (NCMC). NCMC is a nonprofit organization that offers consulting, technical assistance and resources to municipalities and local government cannabis regulators across the United States. NCMC is home of the Cannabis Center for Municipalities. Additionally, NCMC offers executive search services for local and state government cannabis regulations through its partner RegulatorSearch.com. As City Clerk, he is responsible for overseeing medical and adult-use cannabis regulations in Pontiac.

In 2022, Doyle co-founded the Municipal Cannabis Regulators Network (MCRN). MCRN is a professional national network of municipal cannabis administrators who oversee medical and/or recreational marijuana regulations in boroughs, cities, townships and villages across the country. In addition, he developed the 2022 Michigan Local Government Marijuana Review Process Survey to gain a better understanding of local government cannabis regulations and administration throughout the state.

He holds a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in Nonprofit Administration from Eastern Michigan University. His Bachelor of Arts degree is from Wayne State University. Doyle is a certified nonprofit professional (CNP).



Damian Fagon

Damian Fagon was appointed as the Chief Equity Officer of the NYS Office of Cannabis Management in June 2022. In this role, Mr. Fagon will oversee the social and economic equity initiatives laid out in the MRTA. As a 3rd-generation farmer with a background in international development, agriculture and small business, he has led development initiatives with castor farmers in Jamaica, rice growers in Sierra Leone, and coffee exporters in Guatemala. Mr. Fagon has also launched and advised commercial cannabis operations in South Carolina, New York, and the Caribbean.



Kenneth Finn

Kenneth Finn, MD has been practicing Pain Medicine in Colorado Springs since 1994. He is Board Certified in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (1995), Pain Medicine (1998), and Pain Management (2000). He is certified in Cannabis Science through the University of Colorado (2022). He is President (2022) of the American Board of Pain Medicine and has served on their Exam Council for over 20 years. He served on the Colorado Governor's Task Force on Amendment 64, which legalized marijuana for recreational use, Consumer Safety and Social Issues Work Group (2012) and serve 4 years on Colorado's Medical Marijuana Scientific Advisory Council (2014-18). He was an invited speaker to the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, March 2023. He has testified to the Canadian Senate on their marijuana bill (2018) as well as New York General Assembly, and speaks internationally on the health impacts of marijuana, including being an invited speaker to the Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, UCLA VA Medical Center, and the Texas Medical Society, among many others. He works nationally with other state legislators considering legalizing marijuana for medical and recreational purposes. He is editor of Cannabis in Medicine: An Evidence-Based Approach (2020) and currently the Co-Vice President (2021) of the International Academy on the Science and Impacts of

Cannabis (<https://iasic1.org>) which is now a member of the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (2023).



Teresa Fiore

Teresa Fiore is a resident of New York City who has witnessed increase in crime in her neighborhood and a spike in consumption among adolescents in the city at large as a result of changes in cannabis policy. She is an advocate for effective regulation of sale, purchase and consumption, and for informational campaigns about the damage of cannabis on teen's physical and psycho-emotional health.



Steve Glassman

Mr. Glassman is a father of two boys, who tragically lost his older son Nick in January 2022 when Nick took his life after being impacted by cannabis induced psychosis after using high-potency THC marijuana products. Steve is currently the CFO and COO of Nephila Capital, a hedge fund that manages institutional capital that is invested in the insurance-linked securities space. Prior to joining Nephila in 2010, Mr. Glassman spent 22 years with Merrill Lynch/Bank of America in New York, working in the real estate group, primarily in the commercial real estate space. Mr. Glassman was most recently the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Global Real Estate Principal Investments. Mr. Glassman received his BA in Economics from Vanderbilt University.



Katharine Harris

Katharine Harris is the Alfred C. Glassell, III, Fellow in Drug Policy at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. She examines local, state, and national drug laws and supports reforms that reduce the harms of drug use and drug policy. Her current research focuses on the availability of overdose prevention and drug treatment resources for at-risk populations and the effects of recreational cannabis legalization on legal system outcomes.



Deborah Hasin

Dr. Hasin is Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia University, with a joint appointment in the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, Department of Psychiatry, and the Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Epidemiology. Dr. Hasin's research focuses on studies of drug, alcohol, and psychiatric disorders in the general population and in clinical populations, and national time trends and influences on such trends, including cannabis legalization. Dr. Hasin has received multiple NIH and other grants, and published over 500 papers, including over 14 papers that addressed cannabis in some way. She directs the Substance Dependence Research Group at New York State Psychiatric Institute, and has been director of the Substance Abuse Epidemiology Training Program in the Mailman School of Public Health since 2012. She was text editor for the DSM-5-TR Substance Use Disorder chapter, and is currently chairperson of the NIDA K review panel and President of the College on Problems of Drug Dependence.



Eugene Hillsman

Eugene Hillsman is Deputy Director of Equity & Inclusion for the California Department of Cannabis Control. Born in Danville, Illinois and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Eugene attended Washington University in St. Louis for college. He later joined the staff of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation as an associate program officer, working to improve equity and increase access to high quality experiences for all young people. He also worked as a criminal justice advocate to reduce the jail and prison population. After graduating from Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs, receiving a Master's in Public Affairs, Eugene decided to pursue further academic interests at Princeton as a doctoral candidate in history. His dissertation, an examination of American cannabis policy, took seriously the impact of the War on Drugs on disadvantaged communities. After finishing his doctoral work, he moved to California to join the Office of Cannabis as Deputy Director in San Francisco. In July 2021, he was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom to be Deputy Director of Equity & Inclusion for California's Department of Cannabis Control.



Erin Johnson

Erin Johnson is the Illinois Cannabis Regulation Oversight Officer (CROO). Prior to CROO, Erin served as an associate corporate counsel for Amazon Web Services where she evaluated the regulatory risk to AWS in foreign countries. She also served as chief of staff at the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice and as associate general counsel and chief diversity officer for the office of the Illinois governor. Erin received a B.A. in History from Dartmouth College, an M.S. in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, and a J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School. She is admitted to practice law in Illinois and Wisconsin.



Renee M. Johnson

Dr. Johnson is a Professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Her work addresses injury and violence, substance use, and overdose prevention. She leads the NIH-funded Drug Dependence Epidemiology Training Program and is Associate Director for Training & Education with the Hopkins Center for Injury Research & Policy. Johnson also serves as Vice Chair for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Department of Mental Health, as well as Deputy Chair for the DrPH Program. Dr. Johnson received her BA at Spelman College (1996) and her MPH and PhD degrees at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health (1998, 2004). She conducted postdoctoral training at Harvard Chan School of Public Health (2004-2006).



Pia Mauro

Pia M. Mauro, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. As a substance use epidemiologist, Dr. Mauro's work focuses on individual- and structural-level drivers of substance use treatment need, uptake, availability, and outcomes. She leads health services and policy research to improve the health of marginalized populations over the life course, including racial or ethnic minoritized groups, older adults, and people exposed to the criminal legal system. She is the Principal Investigator of two National Institute on Drug Abuse grants examining relationships between substance use treatment-related outcomes and multi-level exposures,

including state cannabis laws (K01DA055606) and county incarceration (R01DA055606). She was also awarded the Columbia University Calderone Prize for Junior Faculty Development.



Wesley McWhite

Wesley McWhite III was appointed by Governor Murphy as the first director of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission. In this capacity he builds relationships with New Jersey's unrepresented and underrepresented communities to facilitate their participation in the state's cannabis industry as businesses or as patients. He is also responsible for building policies, practices, and procedures that promote and maintain fairness, equity, and diversity in all parts of the agency's work.

Even before joining the Commission, Wesley's career has been marked with service to vulnerable communities.

Wesley came to the NJ-CRC from the Hyacinth Foundation – New Jersey's largest, statewide HIV treatment and prevention non-profit organization. As the development director and policy manager at Hyacinth, he lead advocate organizations and lobbied for equitable access to medications and for health equity in state and federal health policy.

Prior to his time at Hyacinth, Wesley served as an outreach coordinator for the unhoused and unsheltered with Volunteers of America Delaware Valley in the city of Camden. While there, Wesley built sustainable models that bridged services gaps for individuals seeking supportive housing.

Wesley was born and raised in Trenton, New Jersey and currently resides in Newark.

Jason Ortiz

Jason Ortiz is the Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Last Prisoner Project. Jason was arrested for simple cannabis possession at the age of 16 in Norwich CT, and that experience inspired him to become a cannabis justice advocate. After graduating from the University of Connecticut in Storrs with a degree in Public and Community Engagement, He was one of the founding board Members of the Minority Cannabis Business Association where he empowered legacy entrepreneurs of color to become policy advocates through the organizing of 5 cannabis policy summits that brought together dozens of stakeholders of color to draft model Social Equity legislation.

In his home state of Connecticut, Jason was a founding member of Connecticut United For Reform and Equity and the lead drafter of 2021's HB6377, "An act creating an equitable and modern cannabis workforce", which was ultimately incorporated into Connecticut's cannabis legalization framework. After ending prohibition in his home state, Jason took his skills to the national level as and is the immediate past Executive Director of Students for Sensible Drug Policy, where he trained hundreds of students how to end the war on drugs through community organizing, policy development and lobbying, and direct action.

In addition to his drug policy activism, Jason sits on the board of the CT Working Families Party and has served as President of the Connecticut Puerto Rican Agenda where he organized for economic justice for his home island of Puerto Rico.





Kyle Page

Kyle Page was negatively impacted by the prohibition of cannabis starting at a very young age and has served over 8 years in prison for cannabis offenses. Kyle is a social justice activist, dispensary manager, and an experienced cultivator.



Tiffanie Perrault

Tiffanie Perrault graduated with a PhD in Economics from the University of Montreal in 2022. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at McGill University. Her research applies Microeconomics and Industrial Organization to tackle questions relevant to public policy and health economics. In particular, she is interested in modeling and understanding agents' behaviors to inform policy design. Most of her work has been focused on cannabis legalization policies and understanding to which extent licit markets can compete with the black market.



Maria H. Rahmandar

Dr. Rahmandar is an attending physician in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, the founding Medical Director of the Substance Use & Prevention Program, and an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. She is board-certified in Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. She speaks on adolescent cannabis use with pediatric providers, co-authored review articles on adolescent cannabis use, and has been called on by media and government agencies to comment on and advise cannabis policy. Dr. Rahmandar is a co-author of upcoming revisions to the American Academy of Pediatrics statements on cannabis use.



Al Romero-Gibu

Al Romero-Gibu is the Cannabis Manager for the City of Grand Rapids. He is responsible for all local processes relating to the cannabis industry, including zoning, licensing, policy, and social equity and neighborhood impact. He is a graduate of Aquinas College and started working for the City of Grand Rapids in 2019.



Juli Shamash

Juli Shamash is a former elementary school teacher turned stay-at-home mom. After tragically losing her 19-year-old son Tyler from fentanyl poisoning in 2018, she and another grieving mom started Moms Against Drugs, a nonprofit to help other grieving parents. Juli is currently focusing on her family's new non profit, Drug Awareness Foundation. She is working to promote fentanyl awareness and drug education for grades 7-12. She speaks to students, parents, and professional groups about drug abuse, overdose prevention, and the dangers of fentanyl-poisoned drugs. She also works on distributing fentanyl testing strips and naran in her community.

Juli, along with Dr. Roneet Lev, was the driving force behind the legislation, SB864- Tyler's Law, which requires every hospital in California to test for fentanyl whenever they order a standard five-panel urine drug test. It was signed into California law on January 1st, 2022. Tyler's Law was also just introduced bipartisanly in the United States House and Senate.



Stephanie Shepard

Stephanie Shepard was convicted of conspiracy to distribute marijuana in 2010. As a first-time, non-violent offender, Stephanie was sentenced to ten years in the Federal Bureau Of Prisons. After serving nine years, she was placed on federal probation for an additional five years.

Stephanie now serves as Last Prisoner Project's Director of Advocacy and sits on the organization's Board of Directors. She is adamantly advocating for restorative justice for those who have suffered and continue to suffer as she has from the criminalization of cannabis.



Yuyan Shi

Dr. Yuyan Shi is associate professor of health economics and health policy in School of Public Health, University of California San Diego. Her expertise includes health economics, health policy, behavioral economics, epidemiology, and spatial studies of drug abuse and related consequences. Particularly related to cannabis, Dr. Shi is interested in evaluating the impacts of cannabis legalization and commercialization, monitoring the point-of-sale marketing activities in cannabis dispensaries and their compliance to laws, evaluating the impacts of marketing and location of cannabis dispensaries, conducting behavioral economics experiments to understand consumer response to product and policy variations, and epidemiology of cannabis abuse in vulnerable populations. Her research has been continuously funded by federal and state grants in the past 10 years.



Shaleen Title

Shaleen Title is founder and director of Parabola Center, a nonprofit think tank, and a Distinguished Cannabis Policy Practitioner in Residence at The Ohio State University's Drug Enforcement and Policy Center. Previously, she served as a cannabis regulator in Massachusetts, where she was nicknamed "The People's Weed Watchdog" by Boston Magazine.



Shelia P. Vakharia

Sheila P Vakharia is the Deputy Director of Research and Academic Engagement. In this role, she helps DPA staff and others understand a range of drug policy issues. Dr. Vakharia builds relationships with drug researchers and helps to advance policy-relevant research. She also mobilizes researchers in support of DPA policy campaigns and organizes conferences on key issues in drug policy. Before joining DPA, Dr. Vakharia was an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Long Island University. She has also worked as a clinical social worker in both abstinence-only and harm reduction settings. Her research interests include harm reduction therapy, drug policy reform, drug stigma, overdose prevention, and social work education. She is on the Board of Directors of Filter magazine. Dr. Vakharia received a Ph.D. in Social Welfare from Florida International University, a Master's in Social Work

from Binghamton University, and a Post-Master's Certificate in Addictions from New York University.



Abigail Vivas

Abigail Vivas serves as the first Chief Equity Officer of Missouri's Division of Cannabis Regulation and oversees the Office of Business Opportunity. The Chief Equity Officer position was established with the passage of Amendment 3 in November 2022 along with the cannabis microbusiness program. The program is designed to allow marginalized or under-represented individuals to participate in the state's legal marijuana industry. Abby is responsible for developing and implementing programs to inform the public of microbusiness license opportunities, establishing public education and targeted technical assistance programming detailing the licensing process, and informing individuals of the support and resources that the office can provide. She certifies that microbusiness applicants are eligible for microbusinesses licensure.

Before joining the field of cannabis regulation, Abby had an extensive career in forensic science, spending 18 years with the Missouri State Highway Patrol Crime Laboratory Division. Primarily working in Drug Chemistry, she saw the evolution of cannabis from a different lens. She also managed the Missouri Department of Agriculture Feed Laboratory before accepting the position with DCR.



Donte West

The University of Michigan named Donte West the 2779th Exoneration in the United States. Donte was sentenced to serve 7 years and 8 months in prison for Possession with intent to distribute in the State of Kansas he was convicted by a jury in 2017 for distributing a pound of marijuana on his first offense. After losing his direct appeal in 2019 he taught himself law reading every book available he filed a 60-1507 Habeas Corpus motion where he prevailed in 2020 getting the county prosecutor to agree to release him in 2020. Donte was projected to be released in 2025 since his release he has become an advocacy associate for the Last Prisoner Project where he has helped secure the early release of prisoners around the U.S. and is the Chief of Business Development for illicit gardens. He also attends the University of Rutgers Cannabis Law and Business.



Christopher Williams

Dr. Williams is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the State University of New York at Purchase College and Senior Vice President at National Health Promotion Associates. Dr. Williams' work focuses on substance use and abuse and several interrelated areas including, the psychosocial etiology research that examines individual, family, and community-level risk and protective factors linked to risk behavior. The preventive intervention research that evaluates theoretically informed educational and behavioral interventions to prevent health-harming behavior and promote positive youth development; and health disparities research that examines the influence of social determinants on health outcomes. Dr. Williams' work has been published in several high-impact, peer-reviewed journals and is supported by agencies at the NIH, the CDC, and the DoD.



Dale Willits

Dale Willits is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. His research areas include policing, violence, and drug policy. He was part of a larger NIJ-funded team that explored the effects of recreational cannabis legalization in Colorado and Washington and has published on crime rates, arrest trends, clearance rates, and officer perceptions following legalization.